



CABINET FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES  
DEPARTMENT FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

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What to do about your food if the POWER goes out!

Do not open the refrigerator or freezer. Tell your little ones not to open the door. An unopened refrigerator will keep foods safely cold for about 4 hours. A full freezer will hold the temperature for approximately 48 hours, 24 hours if it is half full. If it looks like the power outage will be for more than 2-4 hours, pack refrigerated food items such as milk, dairy products, meats, eggs, and left-overs into a cooler surrounded by ice. **Try to obtain block or dry ice to keep your refrigerator as cold as possible.** If it looks like the power outage will last for several days, 50 pound of dry ice should hold an 18-cubic foot full freezer for 2 days. Plan ahead and know where you can buy block ice or dry ice.

**CAUTION:** You must be careful when handling dry ice. **Never** touch dry ice with bare hands or breathe its vapors in an enclosed area. Dry ice is frozen carbon dioxide, a gas.

What do I need if the power will be out?

- **Coolers:** One or more coolers. Styrofoam coolers can do an excellent job as well.
- **Ice:** Placing ice around your food in a cooler will ensure that it will stay cold.
- **Thermometer:** A digital, dial, or instant-read food thermometer or appliance thermometers will help you know if the food is at safe temperatures. Keep appliance thermometers in the refrigerator and freezer no matter how long the power has been out. The refrigerator temperature should be 40°F or below: the freezer, 0°F or lower. If you are not sure a particular food is cold enough, take its temperature with a food thermometer.

Follow these steps to help keep food safe during power outages or when the freezer or refrigerator is not working:

If the appliance will be working again within a couple of hours, just minimize the opening of the freezer and refrigerator doors. If the freezer is not full, quickly group packages and poultry items from other foods. If the raw meat and poultry begin to thaw this will prevent their juices from getting onto other foods. When the refrigerator and/or freezer is operating again, follow these guidelines to decide what to do with foods:

- Refrigerated foods should be safe as long as power is out no more than 4 hours.
- **Throw out any perishable food in your refrigerator, such as meat, poultry, lunchmeats, fish, dairy products, eggs, and any prepared or cooked foods that have been above 40°F for 2 hours, because bacteria can multiply to unsafe levels under these conditions.**
- Fresh fruits and vegetables are safe as long as they are still firm and there is no evidence of mold, or sliminess.
- If an appliance thermometer was kept in the freezer, read the temperature when power comes back on. If the appliance thermometer stored in the freezer reads 40°F or below, the food is safe and may be refrozen.
- If a thermometer has not been kept in the freezer, check each package of food to determine the safety.
- If the food still contains ice crystals or is 40°F or below, it is safe to refreeze.
- Raw meats, and poultry, cheese, juices, breads and pastries can be refrozen without losing too much food quality.
- Prepared foods, fish, vegetables and fruits in the freezer, can be refrozen safely, but food quality may suffer.
- Remember, you can't rely on appearance or odor of the food to determine if it is safe. Food that has thawed or was help above 40°F for more than 2 hours should be thrown out because bacteria may multiply to unsafe levels.
- To remove spills and freshen the freezer and refrigerator, wash them with a solution of 2 tablespoons of baking soda dissolved in 1 quart of warm water.
- To absorb any lingering odors, place an open box or dish of baking soda in the appliance.

Questions and Answers

What if I go to bed and the power is still not on?

Before you go to bed, pack your perishables into your coolers if you haven't already done so and put in as much ice as you can. When you go to bed, leave a bedroom light switched on. When the power goes back on, it will wake you, so you can check the condition of your foods in the refrigerator and freezer.

What if the power goes out while I'm at work or out of the house and it has been more than a few hours before I get home?

Try to determine how long the power has been out. Check the internal temperature of the food in your refrigerator with your thermometer. A liquid such as milk or juice is easy to check. Spot check other items like steaks or left-overs also. If the internal temperature of the food is above 40°F, it should be thrown out. (Check the chart on the back) If the food in the freezer is below 40°F and there are still ice crystals, you can usually refreeze. (Check the chart on the back)

What if the power goes out and comes back while I am out?

If your freezer is fairly full and you know it was not longer than 24 hours, the food should be OK. There will be loss of quality with refreezing, but the food will be safe. If the refrigerator was out for more than 2-4 hours, you should check the perishable food items to determine if the food has been above 40°F.

POWER OUTAGE! What food can I save?

When to save and when to throw away! Use this chart to see what should be thrown away and what can be kept.

Refrigerator Foods		Food held above 40°F for over 2 hours
Dairy, Eggs, Cheese	Dairy, Eggs, Cheese	
Milk, cream, sour cream, buttermilk, evaporated milk, yogurt		Throw away
Butter, margarine		Keep
Baby formula, opened		Throw away
Fresh eggs, hard-cooked in shell, egg dishes, egg products, custards, puddings		Throw away
Hard cheeses: Cheddar, Colby, Swiss, parmesan, provolone, Romano		Keep
Soft cheeses: blue/bleu, Roquefort, Brie, Camembert, cottage, cream, Edam, Monterey Jack, ricotta, mozzarella, Muenster		Throw away
Processed cheeses		Keep
Shredded cheeses, low-fat cheeses		Throw away
Grated Parmesan, Romano, or combination (in can or jar)		Keep
Fruits and Vegetables	Fruits and Vegetables	
Fresh fruits, cut		Throw away
Fresh fruits; not cut, fruit juices; opened, canned fruits; opened, coconut, raisins, dried fruits, candied fruits, dates		Keep
Vegetables; raw		Keep
Fresh mushrooms, herbs, spices		Keep
Vegetables; cooked, vegetable juice; opened, greens; pre-cut, pre-washed, packaged		Throw away
Baked potatoes, potato salad, commercial garlic in oil or butter		Throw away
Meat, Poultry, Seafood	Meat, Poultry, Seafood	
Fresh or leftover meat, poultry, fish, or seafood, thawing meat or poultry		Throw away
Lunchmeats, hotdogs, bacon, sausage, dried beef		Throw away
Canned meats; opened		Throw away
Canned hams (labeled “Keep Refrigerated”)		Throw away
Mixed Dishes, Side Dishes	Mixed Dishes, Side Dishes	
Casseroles, soups, stews, pizza with any topping		Throw away
Meat, tuna, shrimp, chicken, egg salad		Throw away
Fresh pasta, cooked pasta, spaghetti, pasta salads with mayonnaise or vinegar base		Throw away
Gravy, stuffing		Throw away
Breads, Cakes, Cookie, Pastries, Pies	Breads, Cakes, Cookie, Pastries, Pies	
Bread, rolls, cakes, muffins, quick breads, Cream or cheese filled pastries and pies		Keep
Breakfast foods—waffles, pancakes, bagels		Keep
Refrigerator biscuits, rolls, cookie dough		Throw away
Pastries; cream filled, Pies—custard, cheese filled, or chiffon, cheesecake		Throw away
Pastries, pies; fruit filled		Keep
Sauces, Spreads, Jams	Sauces, Spreads, Jams	
Opened mayonnaise, tartar sauce, horseradish		Throw away if above 50°F for over 8 hours
Peanut butter, jelly, relish, taco, barbecue & soy sauce; mustard; catsup; olives, opened vinegar-based dressings		Keep
Worcestershire sauce, fish sauces, oyster sauces, Hoisin sauces, opened spaghetti sauce; opened creamy based dressings		Throw away

Frozen Foods	Still contains ice crystals, and feels as cold as if refrigerated: food below 40°F	Food thawed, food held above 40°F for over 2 Hours
Meat and Mixed Dishes		
Beef, veal, lamb, pork, ground meats, poultry, ground poultry	Refreeze	Throw away
Variety meats (liver, kidney, heart, chitterlings)	Refreeze	Throw away
Casseroles, stews, soups	Refreeze	Throw away
Fish, shellfish, breaded seafood products	Refreeze, may be some texture & flavor loss	Throw away
Dairy, Eggs, Cheese		
Milk	Refreeze, may be lose some texture	Throw away
Eggs (out of shell), egg products	Refreeze	Throw away
Ice cream, frozen yogurt	Throw away	Throw away
Cheese (soft and semi soft), cream cheese, ricotta	Refreeze, may lose some texture	Throw away
Hard cheese (cheddar, Swiss, parmesan)	Refreeze	Refreeze
Shredded cheeses	Refreeze	Throw away
Casseroles containing milk, cream, eggs, soft cheeses	Refreeze	Throw away
Cheesecake	Refreeze	Throw away
Fruits and Vegetables		
Fruit Juices	Refreeze	Refreeze, throw away if moldy, yeasty smell or sliminess develops
Home or commercially packaged fruit	Refreeze, will change texture & flavor	Refreeze, throw away if moldy, yeasty smell or sliminess develops
Vegetable Juices	Refreeze	Throw away after held above 40°F for 6 hrs.
Home or commercially packaged or blanched vegetables	Refreeze, will change texture & flavor	Throw away after held above 40°F for 6 hrs.
Breads, Pastries, Baking Ingredients		
Breads, rolls, muffins, cakes (without custard filling)	Refreeze	Refreeze
Pie crusts, commercial and homemade bread dough	Refreeze, some loss of quality	Refreeze, some loss of quality
Cakes, pies, pastries with custards or cheese filling	Refreeze	Throw away
OtherOtherOther		
Casseroles—pasta, rice based	Refreeze	Throw away
Flour, cornmeal, nuts	Refreeze	Refreeze
Breakfast items—waffles, pancakes, bagels	Refreeze	Refreeze
Frozen meal, entrée, specialty items (pizza, sausage, and biscuit, meat pie, convenience foods)	Refreeze	Throw away